



At the controls

March 7, 2019

Laboratory employee Jocelyn Buckley finishes her preflight checklist and via headset communicates with Los Alamos County Airport traffic. Before takeoff, she looks over at the windsocks to verify wind direction. She then initiates “ground roll” down the smooth runway, easing the throttle forward and adjusting the yoke—the plane’s steering wheel—to accommodate ever-changing winds. As the plane gains speed liftoff comes quickly, the plane’s engine roaring as its wings cut through the New Mexican air.

“Since I started at the Lab in 1998, I have commuted to work by aircraft because I live in Albuquerque,” Buckley explains. “In those early days, I was really afraid of flying because it was a completely different experience for me, sitting as a passenger in a small single-engine plane. The plane accommodated six people, and I usually sat in the far back seat. Whenever we experienced turbulence, I would grab on to the air commuter next to me for dear life.”

Although Jocelyn continued to fly to and from work for the next four years, her fear never quite diminished. “I told myself that I really needed to conquer this fear,” she says. “In early 2002, I began taking private flying lessons. Yes, I was nervous, but I was also determined.”

Flying on her own terms

One year after signing up for her first flying lesson, after having logged approximately 100 flight hours, Buckley received her private pilot’s license. It wasn’t long after receiving this license that she purchased her own private airplane, which she began to use to commute to and from work. Buckley then earned an additional rating in instrument-only flying, which means she can fly “blind” (relying on instruments only) under special conditions, such as flying at night or inside clouds.

Williams’ Jocelyn poses with her single-engine Piper Cherokee after flying to Taos, New Mexico.

“When I first flew solo, I admit I was still nervous,” says Buckley. “I remember as I taxied the plane to the runway, my right foot was literally shaking as it stayed pressed against the airplane’s rudder pedal.” Buckley laughs. “With each flight, however, I became more comfortable in the air.”

Not being nervous anymore does not mean that she has no fear. “I think fear can be healthy when managed properly,” she says. “It keeps me on my toes when I’m up

there. I think too many pilots let confidence overtake their fear, and that's usually when accidents can happen."

Although she has been flying solo for several years, Buckley is always working on ways to improve. "A good pilot is always learning," she says. "I still go up with my instructor once a month, just to maintain proficiency. I am always eager to explore new things that will strengthen my piloting skills."

> [Learn more about Buckley's flying career](#)

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